

Rating programs, at best, is a difficult job. Each trader has their own way of rating programs. Often they use techniques other traders use. The main problem is that a program that is very listenable to one person may not be to another. Often this is due to a more critical ear or more sophisticated equipment. Some, like Roger Hill, give a very detailed rating, noting all the imperfections. Other, like myself, do not rate each program but do note serious problems. Still others don't indicate problems at all. Most, I think, fall in between the first and second group. I'm going to review my rating procedures and also mention the different types of listening problems:

If there is no problem mentioned next to one of my programs, it means that it is very listenable and can be understood without strain. Some problems I've found are noted below with abbreviations I use:

- b - bassy; often this can be corrected by giving it more treble.
- m - muffled; when this occurs you can't understand the program well at all.
- h - hum; if slight and doesn't interfere with the listening it is not noted. Otherwise it is.
- hi - hiss; noted if severe
- f - fast; this can't be corrected unless you have a variable speed recorder or devise some technique of changing the speed of the tape/
- sl - slow; same as above
- x talk - cross talk, background talk, interference from another station, especially with rebroadcasts. Doublespeeding both tracks at once often causes this
- sq - squeal; squeal or whistle. This happened to me when I first started dubbing due to poor patchcord connections.
- p - piercing, tinny, raspy, harsh; This is the type of sound that goes right through your skin.
- overmod - overmodulated; When this happens your volume level dances all around, often in the red and the sound is distorted. Often a hum occurs.
- op - opening; If opening is missing or cut this is noted
- cl - closing; See above
- mud - muddled; Usually this occurs at the beginning of a program/
- vol - volume; If very soft it is noted
- vol fl - volume fluctuation; If the volume fluctuates noticeably it is noted
- scr - scratchy; This is noted when it seriously distracts from the sound
- s.n. - surface noise; similar to above
- wow and fl - wow and flutter; When this is very severe, especially in musical parts, it is noted
- dr - dropout; When some frequencies or sound is missing and is severe it is noted. This sometimes occurs when a program has made the rounds of many tape recorders and some have poor heads. Also it is due to poor tape.
- cr - crackling; Often due to poor patchcord connections.

Many of these problems can be corrected by special equipment. When trading, understand the other person's rating procedures before you start. Be willing to replace any shows that are not what the other person thought they were. Also agree on the brand of tape and whether special equipment is used. When buying tape for the first time from someone, buy a very limited amount to judge the quality and promptness.

Please comment on this and following articles.

When I started dubbing in 1970, I knew just about nothing about the techniques of trading including dubbing, listing programs, rating shows, mailing, etc. I've picked up many hints from many of you and have developed some of my own. If you have any more, let me know. Speed and efficiency as well as good quality are essential in this hobby.

LISTENING AND LISTING: I at least spot check all programs before listing them. Ideally you should hear the whole show. As I listen to them I record the essential information in a notebook arranged alphabetically by first letter. I note the reading on the tape counter at beginning and ends of programs and put the numbers on the cards in the tape box. I number the boxes and cards and record this, noting who sent each box for future reference.

People list their programs different ways. Some do it by reel and some alphabetically like myself. Some do it by type of program. Some lists are extremely detailed such as the ones made by Steve Moreno and Howard Brenner. Others are fairly detailed like mine. Others give just the program. On my listing I note number of program, title, description (including guests, date, etc.), sponsor, network, length of time of show (22 minute-programs are listed as 25 minutes; 28 minute-programs are listed 30, etc.), reel number, and problems if any. Some problems in listing descriptions is that some programs have no titles and the trader makes his own description. Because this can vary for the same program, duplications arise.

Some difficult programs to describe are OUR MISS BROCKS, GANGBUSTERS, FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY, GUNSMOKE, soap operas. Because most programs fall short of 30 minutes, especially if commercials are deleted, it is often wise to include more programs than you want (7 hours for a 6-hour order). In this way some 15 minute programs can be used as fillers. Many traders try to fill up the tape. On band remotes and quiz shows, etc. I list the first song, joke, contestant, etc. to help identify the show. I also separate programs about radio (LP's, TV, tributes, etc.) from my regular list. I note in my listing if a program is from a commercial disc. Also if it is taped directly from a transcription I note it. This is difficult to know unless the listing you are ordering from makes some note of this. Some traders note the person who sent the tape and if it has gone through few generations.

DUBBING AND MAKING OUT CARDS: Dubbing all the programs on a reel saves time and many traders just trade that way. Save 15 minute programs as fillers. Put essential information on the card. I use large file cards and put the number, time, and important information. I keep the sender's request list so I can cross check so duplication won't arise. Date the sender's request list when you mail the tape.

I also cross out the program on the want list and note fillers sent. Also I check the program sent on my own list to get an idea of these programs that are requested more than others. Using patch-cords from preamp outputs to inputs and keeping an eye on the volume and tone control if you have one on the dubbing machine are essential. A machine with a third playback head is ideal for listening to the shows you are dubbing. I have often noted bad tape this way. Some traders put all programs on their own master tape and then dub them off. Also it might help to stamp your name on the card you put in the box so in case box and card get separated, you know to whom it belongs.

Please send in comments on this article. Part 3 next month.

MAILING WANTS: Keeping track of wants you send out is another tedious job, but record keeping is essential if you don't want to duplicate orders. I jot down programs ordered in another notebook alphabetically by first letter with initials of person I'm ordering it from. I check it in the person's catalog. For programs with many titles (SUSPENSE, JACK BENNY, etc.) that I will order a lot of I note them on large sheets of paper with much space allotted for each program. Even so I still duplicate programs once in a while, especially if title or description is different in the catalog. When sending wants it's good to put number, title, and reel number if it is listed. The time of the show is also helpful.

RECEIVING THE TAPE: Cross off programs on your list and in catalog of person from whom you are receiving the tape. I add information to the card if necessary at that point so I don't have to refer to the list again when I make my supplements.

MAILING TAPE: My first mailings were pretty insecure as I found out. Tape boxes can be used over and over again and I'm sure you all accumulate a supply. I attach each tape end to the reel so when you receive it the tape isn't all over the box. Scotch tape the box so it doesn't open and put your name on the outside of the box so if the container breaks there is still some record as to where to send it. Make sure stamps, mailing address, return address, 4th-class marking is on the mailing package. Buying a stamp with your name and address can save a lot of time. I keep another notebook with the names of all my trading friends in alphabetical order by first letter only, address, and a record of all wants and tapes received and sent and the dates. This helps in case a tape gets lost and you have to tell the postman in tracing it when you sent it. Make sure you use strong packaging tape to secure package.

MAKING A CATALOG: Partly because of the variety of catalogs being circulated and partly because of the requests of some of my readers, what follows is my idea of what should be included in a catalog and how. This should be of special interest to new collectors but many experienced collectors might gain some new information.

1. Use 8½ by 11 paper. If printed on smaller paper try to have it open to 12 by 11 so it can fit into a looseleaf notebook.

2. Listing the programs in alphabetical order is easier for the reader to find what he wants. Some traders prefer trading by the reel and list that way. When receiving programs write them down in a notebook alphabetically by first letter with essential information. When making a list or supplement you can use this alphabetical reference list and therefore keep your catalog in alphabetical order. If you list by reel and indicate tracks use the following: 1-1, 2-4, 1-3, 2-2. This is read side 1-track 1, side 2-track 4, side 1-track 3, side 2-track 2. Some suggest, if listing by reel, putting down the sender of the reel so quality can be further judged if source is known.

3. If you know some programs are from disc or very few generations, list them separately or indicate them in some way (by an asterick is a good way). Have an introductory sheet explaining how to order, mechanics of trading, how to read unusual aspects of your catalog, ratings, tape you use, etc.

More on making a catalog next month. Please comment on these articles.

MORE ON MAKING A CATALOG

ORDER OF INFORMATION: 4. First use a code number of some kind in identifying the program. This is of use to the sender so he can find the requests easily enough. A chronological number, reel number, or identifying code is enough. If a code is used, explain it in the introduction.

5. Next comes the series title in capital letters. Use the series title as indicated in the program on the tape. Be careful about distinguishing between titles of shows such as COLUMBIA WORKSHOP, CBS RADIO WORKSHOP, COLUMBIA PRESENTS CORWIN, and others. Be accurate.

6. Next comes the program title, if any, guests and the date if known and substantiated, ideally by a perpetual calendar. If there is no program title given or guests, describe the program using the following methods:

Musical programs: first song

Quiz programs: first joke or contestant

Drama or comedy: opening segment, including names of people, as in GUNSMOKE and soap operas. In comedies include the main idea of the program rather than opening minute or two. Skits performed should also be mentioned. For drama or comedy main characters are essential to identifying the program...If no date is given, give the day, time and other clues that may be given by opening and closing announcements. Many collectors give a story summary even if the program title is given as in SUSPENSE and ESCAPE. This adds to a much better and more detailed listing.

7. Indicate the sponsor if given. Many collectors have a certain series or program but edited or AFRS and are looking for a sponsored one. Some collectors will not trade for certain programs unless this information is given.

8. The network should be listed if mentioned at the end of the program. Indicate if syndicated, AFRS, edited, BBC, records, TV, or movie soundtracks.

9. Indicate an accurate time. Don't call 20-minute programs 30-minute ones because 3 20-minute programs will fit on one track of a 1200-foot reel. Also, when dubbing, don't go from 1 track to another with the same program unless it is exceptionally long. Splice a little tape to finish it. Also make sure your dubbing reel doesn't run short and the program is cut off before the end.

10. QUALITY: It is probably useless to have a standard ratings system because all individuals differ on good, very good, excellent, etc. I personally suggest that specific problems be indicated. For my suggestions see Part 1.

11. Separate and clarify items by punctuation (semi-colons, quotation marks, spaces) and indentation.

12. If you have several programs from the same series, mention series once and indent for further programs. EXAMPLES FOLLOW:

842 HOP HARRIGAN: 8/17/43; Hop, a prisoner on an island, tries
n to escape in his plane (NBC-Blue) 15 67
3797 SUSPENSE: Sneak Preview; 3/23/44; J Cotten (Roma, CBS) 30 484
5557 One Millionth Joe; 6/22/50; Jack Carson (Auto, CBS) 30 749
3663 JACK BENNY: 2/4/54; St. Albans Hospital; F Allen, P Hoffa
(L Strikes, CBS) 30 467

This is concise but gives essential information. The first number is the chronological listing. The last two are the time and reel.

Your style of writing will be up to you. Just make sure your listing is the way you wish to see others. Comments on this article are welcome.....More on the equipment next month.

(This article was originally written by Bruce Ruggles in 1971.)

This article is not intended as a sermon but as a helpful guide to those of us in radio—that is the hobby of collecting "radio's golden age" on tape. I have been in radio, in almost all capacities, since 1950 and I would like to give some helpful hints on the fine art of preserving those we hold dear...Jack Benny, Fred Allen and all the rest. We as a "club" even though we have no membership badges and are scattered throughout a dozen countries, must immediately take steps to weed out the "unfortunates" and help those who desire quality and not just quantity in obtaining radio shows. Here are hints as I see them which I hope will be of benefit to you—whether a New-comer to the hobby or a collector for years.

CARE AND QUALITY OF TAPES: Always use 1200 ft tapes on 7-inch reels. Even though due to a space shortage 1800 or 2400 ft reels work best, in the long run they don't. The thinner the tape, the more likely it is to stretch. After many dubbings this causes dropouts and loss of quality, not only in your master but in every dub you send out.

Half-track; yes. Quarter-track; no. This can be argued pro and con for hours. One of the problems is cross-talk on $\frac{1}{4}$ -track tape due to limited spacing between tracks. If storage is a problem, get out of the hobby and take up stamp collecting. Any tape, even the best of quality will in time ripple at the outer edges, which means programs recorded on tracks one and four are almost lost.

Most tapes have a poor oxide coating, wrinkles and other problems at the very beginning and end of the tape. Since an extra 2 or 3 minutes is allowed on any new tape, it is best to start recording 1 minute into the tape. And for your friend's sake, put a leader on both ends of your tape to prevent them breaking off, resulting in shows starting a few seconds or minutes into the program.

Watch the humidity factor where you store your tapes. Basements and attics are out. Also, not in direct sunlight. Check your humidity readings occasionally. Use a de-humidifier if necessary.

Use a fair-quality tape in fairness to yourself and others. Scotch is excellent if you can afford it. Remember, your collection is only as good as the tape you put it on. Take time to redub if someone sends you a cheaper brand. He should not complain if you return the same tape to him on the next trade. (Since most collectors expect a new reel of tape, perhaps you should indicate that you are using his reel, erased.)

CARE OF TAPE MACHINES: Oddly enough, the machine that does the job is probably the last thing the collector thinks about. If a machine is giving you any trouble, cease activities and have it fixed before one more dub is made. Most collectors would rather wait and get better quality.

Fade-ins and bang-ins are "no-nos." Either preset your level by means of a test before making each dub, or get an automatic level volume machine that will give you perfect levels without "twisting the dials."

If you do 15-hours worth of taping a week then every 9 months you should have these points checked by a professional serviceman.

1. Replace poor drive belts...
2. Oil the machine—one drop on the end of a screwdriver...
3. Check patch cords for broken wires, secure soldering joints, and grounding problems...
4. Replace the playback-record head(s) of your machine...
5. Replace the rubber capstain which gives you the correct speed and the pressure pads that go against the heads.

(More by Bruce Ruggles next month.)

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Use correct jack outlets and inlets. When dubbing you can't feed one tape machine into the microphone jack of the second. Use proper input and output jacks or you'll get tapes that sound like they are mike or telephone recorded.

Make sure you are using proper jacks for both machines especially if they aren't the same make. Often a jack for a Sony is not adaptable to another machine because of the make-up of the machines.

Remember, if your tape machines are not fully transistorized, you must check tubes often. When they go on a radio or TV set, usually the set just stops working. Faulty tubes in tape machines cause noise and distortion yet the machine still appears to function normally.

Have the speed of your machines checked regularly with a stroboscope. How many programs do you know that are circulating simply because some neophyte didn't check the speeds of his tape machines.

Avoid moving machines. Leave them set up in a permanent place. Make your own workshop. Move the wife out of the kitchen if necessary. Moving your recorders around loosens tubes and tends to put heads out of azimuth adjustment.

Do not clean the heads with lighter-fluid, carbon tetrachloride, etc. These will erode the protective finish on the heads. Obtain a proper headcleaner, soft cotton swabs and clean them every ten to fifteen hours of taping. Make sure also that your tape does not scrape on the bottom or the top edge of the feed-up or take-up reel.

DUBBING FROM TRANSCRIPTIONS: You can't dub a transcription or AFRS disc on your home record player. These discs were designed to be played at radio stations using their turntables, stylus and filtering techniques. Most pre-1950 ET's were designed for a 78 RPM-sized needle stylus. An LP needle will not do the job. Correct filtering can only be done at a station. Get friendly with a DJ there. He'll do it for you. (You might discover some ET's at the station in the process. ed.) To repeat...If you want perfect tracking, full sound, senseless dubs at the proper speed, let the station do the job. Building your own 16-inch turntable to do the job is ridiculous.

OTHER HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS: Ride levels carefully when dubbing. No fair double-speeding or taking a bath. Listen to the output of the machine that is making the dub. This way you can best judge the quality you are sending out...If a tape has a splice in it or you are forced to make one, make a good one. Don't use Scotch tape or a bit of Bond-O. Overlap the ends of the tape by a sixteenth of an inch. Remember, after a few years the tape will pull apart a little, but by that time, if the splice has been ever-so-lightly overlapped, the ends will butt.

Include everything on your dub, right down to the NBC chimes and spots or promos that follow. Don't be in such a hurry to get to the next program.

(This is the second of a two-part article written by Bruce Ruggles for Hello Again in 1971.)